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SUBJECT: EXPANDING PSI IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

REF: BUENOS AIRES 621

¶1. (U) SUMMARY AND ACTION REQUEST: Because of the relative difficulty of regional participation in global Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) events, post requests that the Department and Washington agencies consider establishing a Western Hemisphere PSI Operational Experts Group (OEG) by the end of 2006, and scheduling more regional PSI exercises. A regional PSI focus would train current PSI members in the hemisphere, attract future PSI members, and contribute to overall military-military cooperation in the region. END SUMMARY AND ACTION REQUEST.

¶2. (U) Argentina remains the only country in South America to have endorsed the PSI Statement of Interdiction Principles (in March 2005). Elsewhere in the region, post is aware of only Belize, Canada, the Dominican Republic, Panama, and the U.S. as PSI participants.

¶3. (U) Despite its relative isolation, Argentina has involved itself as much as possible in PSI over the last two years. It attended PSI's first anniversary meeting in Krakow (June 2004), sent observers to Operation Choke Point (November 2004) and Exploring Themis (November 2005), and participated in Pacific Protector (April 2006). Most recently it sent an interagency delegation to the April 11-12 OEG meeting in Miami. A complete history of Argentina's involvement in PSI can be found in ref. A,  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/buenosaires.< /a>>

¶4. (U) However, for smaller countries like Argentina (and elsewhere in the region), full participation is constrained by tight government budgets in general and very tight military spending in particular. This especially applies to events that are well outside the region. The ability of the GOA to participate in a given meeting or exercise is directly related to its distance from Argentina.

¶5. (U) Short of USG funding for PSI participants (which post understands is not an option), one solution would be to create a Western Hemisphere OEG. Another would be more frequent scheduling of regional PSI exercises. These steps would offer the opportunity for current PSI countries in the region to keep abreast of WMD interdiction best practices, as well as increase the likelihood that other countries in the hemisphere would sign up to PSI. As an important secondary

effect, an increased tempo of PSI meetings and exercises in the region would help achieve our broader military goal of developing the region's respective armed forces into coalition-capable partners.

GUTIERREZ